

INTELLOPAX

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INFORMATION REPORT

CD NO.

COUNTRY Bulgaria
SUBJECT Status of the Protestants in Bulgaria

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SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO.

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1. For a short time after 9 September 1944 the Protestants in Bulgaria enjoyed religious freedom. Belief in God, though rejected by Communism was tolerated in the country. In 1948 the Congregational Church services were regularly attended by an increased number of people. This was also true of other denominations.
2. After the trial of the 15 pastors early in 1949,* Protestants were labeled traitors, spies, and instruments of the western capitalists. Much publicity was given by the Government accusing the Protestants of betraying their country.
3. Following the trial many churches remained without pastors. In some places laymen started preaching. In other places churches were closed by the local authorities and services forbidden. Source has been told that the Church of Merichlery is now being used for a Communist Party club. Many people were frightened and preferred not to go to church. There were instances when people were warned not to go to church. Comparing the Sofia churches and those in the provinces, the province churches suffered more losses of pastors and laymen. The Government authorities can exercise greater supervision and pressure in smaller communities. The Protestants in Sofia, therefore, enjoyed greater freedom in that no church was officially closed and people were free to go to church.
4. In November 1948 the editor of the only Protestant newspaper Zornitza was arrested and as of August 1950 was still in a labor camp without having been tried by a court or officially sentenced.
5. A printing house has just recently been taken over for use by the Committee for Science, Art, and Culture.
6. Following the trial of the pastors, many other Protestants were detained for a certain period of time by the militia authorities and others are still in labor camps. Many of the most ardent members of the Methodist Church in Sofia are either imprisoned or in labor camps, and their families have been ordered to leave Sofia.

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7. Protestant churches are suffering from a lack of pastors and further prospects are doubtful as there is no possibility of training new pastors. There is little hope that some of the pastors who have been sentenced for a short period of imprisonment can return and resume work in their churches. The case of Pastor Gradinarov can be given as an example. After two years of imprisonment he was released and returned to Pazardzhik where he started preaching in his church. Following the first service he was re-arrested and is now in a labor camp.
8. The few pastors that have been left free are said to be doing a good job. Some of the pastors are unpaid and earn their living as general laborers, or with any other job they have been able to find.

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~~SECRET~~ Comment: For information concerning the trial of the 15 pastors in early 1949

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